United Nations

Press Release

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General chairs pledging conference in Geneva for United Nations humanitarian operation which needs a further $340 million for its programmes in Gulf region.

- Iran warns of developments in southern Iraq which it says can "seriously threaten national security of Iran and further destabilize entire region".

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar today in Geneva chaired a pledging conference for the United Nations humanitarian operation in the Persian Gulf, which is in deficit of some $340 million for its programmes.

A United Nations press officer reporting from Geneva said the Secretary-General urged the international community to help the Organization meet the exceptional challenge of providing humanitarian needs of helping to restore calm in Iraq, Kuwait and along Iraq's borders with Iran and Turkey. The Secretary-General told donors and international agencies, Iraq must be able to rebuild on a stable basis. Unless that happened, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar warned, the international community would be responsible for the fate of 18 million people -- a responsibility that it could not assume in the long term. He acknowledged sanctions imposed by the Security Council, but stressed that it was important to reconcile them with humanitarian assistance indispensable to the Iraqi people, particularly the most vulnerable groups. It was imperative, he continued, for States to give the United Nations the support needed to implement its humanitarian programme. Noting the tendency to focus on the plight of the Kurds, he recalled that the Shi'ites in southern Iraq were also vulnerable.

The report from Geneva said that Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar pointed out that of the deficit of $340 million for the operation, $35 million was needed to deploy United Nations guards in Iraq -- an important element in providing security in the region.

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For information media—not an official record

Also addressing the pledging conference, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, said the number of Iraqi refugees opting for repatriation had dropped because of renewed fears for their future safety. Some 1 million refugees had returned to Iraq from Turkey and Iran, but 500,000 of them remained displaced because they were afraid to return to their homes, she said. More than 600,000 Iraqi refugees remained in Iran and over 13,000 inside Turkey.

Tomorrow, the Secretary-General will preside over an inter-agency meeting on humanitarian efforts in Iraq and Ethiopia, his spokesman said today. He will also chair a pledging conference on Western Sahara prior to leaving for Bern to attend celebrations marking the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation.

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Meanwhile, Iran has informed the United Nations of developments in southern Iraq which it said "could seriously threaten the national security of Iran and further destabilize the entire region".

In a letter to the Secretary-General of 11 June, Iranian Ambassador Kamal Kharrazi said there was credible evidence that the Iraqi army was preparing for what he called "a general mopping-up operation" in the southern part of the country where some 700,000 Shi'ites are located. He said thousands of Iraqi citizens faced death while several hundred thousand might flee into Iran.

The Ambassador warned the international community that Iran was in no position to care for more Iraqi refugees. He called on the Secretary-General and the Security Council to "adopt immediate measures to avert the risk of recurrence of another tragic incident for the Iraqi population and the region as a whole".

Talking to the press today in Geneva before the pledging conference, the Secretary-General, asked about the situation of the Shi'ites in southern Iraq, said he was concerned with the reports he had heard. He said he had met yesterday with his Executive Delegate, Sadruddin Aga Khan, and that the United Nations was in constant touch with its representatives in Baghdad to follow any new developments.

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